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Duxbury Clipper

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# Duxbury Delights: No Excursions Have Ever Equaled It

by MARY JANE HAYES

**W**hen my twin sister Nancy and I were growing up in Wollaston, Massachusetts, we weren't poor, but there was no money in our family for extras – including a car. Any trips in automobiles we eagerly greeted as “treats” and were owed to the generosity of friends and neighbors.

Nancy's world and mine were widened and deepened most particularly by periodic weekends spent at our best friend Sabra's country house in Duxbury.

## COMMENTARY

We had met Sabra when we were four and had moved to a house

down the block from hers. Sabra's father had died when she was a baby and her mother had moved back in with her parents who became our proxy grandparents, our own grandparents either dead or living in far-off West Virginia, too far by far in those post-depression days for a family with limited means and no car to visit.

Long before the days of the expressway, the trip wended and wound its way into what was then deep country. To youngsters being raised on a 50-foot city lot, Duxbury was a wonderland, beginning with the tall pines that bent cathedral-like over the last stretch of the route. And then so different was the house from all other domiciles in our experience, “The Old Place,” as “Aunt Sabra” (which is what we had dubbed Sabra's mother) called it, might have been a Japanese pagoda or a Swiss chalet. An 18th century farmhouse with a salt-box roofline, the homestead had been in Sabra's family since 1874 when Sabra's great-grandfather had purchased it; except for an interlude when a

stands of spire-like pines – it was the portal to a rustic Paradise!

Imagine a house whose indoors smelled like the outdoors on a crisp, starry night. Fancy drinking well water that was amber in color and iron of taste (pumped by an electric pump in the cellar to the faucets). Conceive of beamed ceilings and of floors, walls and windows wonderfully warped and crooked and creaky! Think of rooms you stepped up into or down out of, five of them with fireplaces and one with a “beehive oven.” Picture a toilet with a pull chain; latches instead of knobs; staircases that were steep and narrow (with cubby holes and closets tucked under them). Reflect on where you slept – a quirky little chamber beneath the eaves with a cur-



**Mary Jane (Kilborn) Hayes, Sabra (Turner) Stockdale, Nancy Anne (Kilborn) Dawe. Behind Sabra, in the shade, her grandfather, Arthur Ryder. July, 1937.**

tain pulled across its “closet,” and a Snow White lamp to light it; you and your sister in your hostess's fourposter while she was relegated to a World War I canvas army cot.

Visualize surroundings of sun-splashed woods

**Sabra's grandfather, Arthur Ryder, and grandmother, Ellen Mae Ryder, July 4, 1935.**



here or there to watch a heron or a hoptoad or a turtle; not forgetting the ailing mouse once yielded up by a meadow (and rescued and returned in a grass-lined shoebox to a drawer in Sabra's bureau, but expiring and having to be buried). And all this landscape – including Sabra's grandmother's fragrant old-fashioned garden – illumined at dusk by the winking of fireflies.

Wollaston's wasn't the only beach where we swam. Duxbury presented us with a pair – one on the ocean side of the Powder Point Bridge (which seemed to roll on forever as Aunt Sabra drove across it) and the other on the bay. Cowards that we were, Nancy and I preferred the second with its tepid water and oozy bottom. If you mustered the will to take a dip in the first – which was often rough and always frigid – you shot up gasping and blue as a plum!

Down the long years since I have traveled all over Europe, to the tropics, to Canada, Bermuda and many parts of the United States, but no excursions have ever equaled for me the magic and meaning of the woods and fields, the beach and brook and that old country house in Duxbury, Ma.

*Mary Jane Hayes is a writer and photographer*



**The Duxbury house and**

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**The  
Duxbury  
house and  
evergreens,  
1938.**

cousin sold it after which Aunt Sabra, with much nostalgic happiness, had bought it back. To us – riding to it in her old Chevy that resembled nothing so much as a black shoebox on wheels – past those

walls and windows wonderfully warped and crooked and creaky! Think of rooms you stepped up into or down out of, five of them with fireplaces and one with a "beehive oven." Picture a toilet with a pull chain; latches instead of knobs; staircases that were steep and narrow (with cubby holes and closets tucked under them). Reflect on where you slept – a quirky little chamber beneath the eaves with a cur-



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Visualize surroundings of sun-splashed woods and fields sprinkled with buttercups and daisies, one meadow sporting a cellar-hole, with a brook running from a millpond and no neighboring houses in sight. Ponder the climbing of the great gloomy Norway Spruce beside the garage whose thick lower boughs were easy to climb onto (and to which we would race as soon as the car pulled in to see who could climb first to the top) and the two maples and one linden that Sabra's grandfather had planted as a boy; playing horseshoes with him on the lawn; pausing

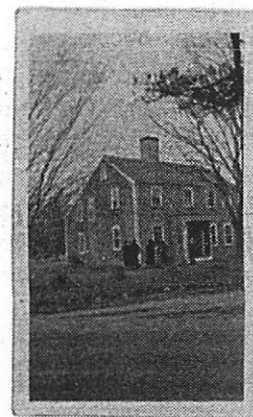
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*Mary Jane Hayes is a writer and photographer from Hanover. Photos courtesy of Sabra Turner Stockdale.*



**The Duxbury house,  
November, 1937.**

# SOUNDING OFF